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Letters to the editor

The CIA's skipper and sinking morale

I read with great interest and approval your editorial entitled, "An intelligence failure?" (Nov. 28). To find such an understanding piece in the press these days is difficult. However, there are two points I wish to make, based on my 30 years of service with CIA.

First, you said that "policy more frequently shapes intelligence — or its interpretation." While this may have been true of some foreign services in World War II and thereafter, the CIA had a remarkable record over the years of not allowing its intelligence memoranda and estimates to be shaped or flawed by policy considerations. This was pointedly shown in the CIA substantive intelligence production on Vietnam, published in *The Pentagon Papers*, and other examples are readily available.

To my certain knowledge, during the period from the late 1940s through the mid-70s, any effort to force estimates to conform to policy would have resulted in a mass resignation of the estimative staff.

Despite the heavy attacks on the CIA during the last three years, its substantive production capability has remained unshaken until now. It retained its equilibrium in this field far beyond what one might expect in view of the troubles to which it has been exposed. Only under the current director, Admiral Stansfield Turner, has serious smoke, if not fire, appeared throughout the intelligence community, suggesting that there may be some "tailoring" of his substantive intelligence product to suit policy predilections. This is a matter of grave concern to us all.

Second, the current key to the whole question is a point on which your editorial was silent. Having largely weathered the storm of the attacks and investigations of the last few years, the CIA and the intelligence community were not prepared to absorb the attack from within which came from the mistakes and faulty leadership of Admiral Turner.

One major item to stress is that CIA's heart has always been its "people." Turner, throughout his career, has shown no ability to deal with people, and he has a dismal reputation for administration of his subordinates. He is not "people" oriented. His senior officers, past and present, will tell you this. Individuals, as such, mean nothing to him. As a result, CIA morale has dropped to an unbelievably low level — as low as I have known it in more than 30 years. This is true not only on the substantive side of the agency but even more so on the clandestine collection side.

President Carter's statement that "there is now a stability in the CIA," made during his August visit to the agency's Langley headquarters, is indeed wide of the mark. He has been badly misled on this point. Turner's disclaimers of low morale and his pious statements of support for human collection (i.e., espionage) as set forth in his interview in *The Star* (Nov. 27), are self-serving and far from the facts. Actually, his appreciation and support of vital clandestine collection efforts render only lip service to activities on which he has at most a minimal grasp.

As one congressman has just written, Turner has "no significant experience in or understanding of intelligence." (It is not unworthy of note that *The Star's* Nov. 27 "close-up" of "Sturdy Stan" appeared in your Portfolio section with other "amusements.")

The admiral shrugs off criticism of these shortcomings as the product of dissident "old boys" who have been long gone from the business and who are unhappy at the cutback of covert action operations. Nothing could be further from the truth. Many of the "old boys" whom Turner criticized in his interview with *The Star* have been retired, with all their years of experience,



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for five years or less; many have given their whole adult lives to intelligence. While a few are bothered to some extent by the restrictions on clandestine intelligence and covert activities, they are unanimously disturbed by the negative influence on the end product — finished intelligence.

If these "old boys" were polled, those who are upset by the current cutback of covert action operations would be found to be an infinitesimal fraction of the whole, for most of them were collection-oriented officers with a general dislike, if not disapproval, of covert action.

For Turner to raise this point in his *Star* interview may be popular with the general public, but it is, in effect, a red herring and inaccurate. It serves only to increase his already sizable credibility gap among his own personnel, and loses whatever support he might have among CIA alumni.

The damage done by Turner's tenure can only be repaired by his removal, a solution devoutly desired by almost all senior policy officials of the administration (despite their public denials), by the CIA, and by the intelligence community as a whole.

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